117 Post Office Road
Enfield, CT 06082
860.253.6502
www.enfieldKITE.org
facebook@enfieldKITE

Testimony in Support of H.B. 6884, Section 11

Appropriations Committee, March 14, 2023

Submitted by Enfield Public Schools and Enfield KITE (Key Initiatives to Early Education)

Good afternoon, Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the **H.B. 6684, Section 11, An Act Concerning the Recruitment, Retention, and Enhancement of the Teaching Profession.** This testimonial is being submitted jointly by Enfield Public Schools and Enfield's Early Education Collaborative, KITE (Key Initiatives to Early Education). Section 11 of this bill is of particular importance to us, because we have seen how using play-based learning as a means of instruction has had a positive impact on our children at the Stowe Early Learning Center.

Stowe Early Learning Center is a state recognized model that houses Head Start, Enfield's Integrated Preschool, PK STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) Academy, and the Enfield Child Development Center. The students in these programs thrive with curriculum full of inquiry and play-based education that we witness daily. They are learning in a manner that is engaging and relevant to their lives. Research clearly shows that play is an essential part of their healthy growth and development. We know that children are born with over 100 million brain cells, and while we cannot impact the number of cells, we can enrich the connection between them through the stimulation that comes with purposeful play (Moyles, 2012[1]). When children experience a rich play-based learning environment, their brain cells are stimulated, and they are able to develop to their fullest potential across all domains of learning.

Play-based learning enhances socialization skills. For example, when children engage in purposeful play, they learn to interact with others, negotiate, share, and take turns. These skills are critical to healthy and successful family, social and academic connections, preparing them to develop teamwork skills to collaborate with others. This communication and teamwork not only promote their brain development in their education but will also provide the framework for the more complex learning experiences in later grades. Play fosters creativity in children, allowing them to use their imagination to create new games, scenarios, and stories, which supports children in developing problem-solving skills and thinking innovatively.

Play is equitable. It eliminates barriers for all students. Creating play scenarios involves building background knowledge together, requires no prior experience, is accessible for all abilities, and provides authentic experiences and common language. For example, a housekeeping corner can represent student's cultures by including food, clothing, and labels that represent the classroom makeup and other cultures present in the broader community. This gives all students in the classroom an opportunity to take pride in and share their heritage and culture.

"By 3 years of age, there is a 30-million-word gap between children from the wealthiest and poorest families. A recent study shows that the vocabulary gap is evident in toddlers. By 18 months, children in different socio-economic groups display dramatic differences in their vocabularies." (Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder, 2013[2]). We regularly witness oral language development through pretend play/play scenarios. Research shows that children engaged in pretend play often use higher forms of language and more robust vocabulary than they would use in normal situations. This result is especially important as we emerge from the pandemic and work to overcome the language deficiencies that have resulted from their isolation. In addition, children learn emergent literacy skills during pretend play, specifically learning about various situations where reading and writing may be needed.

Perhaps most important, play-based learning enables children to develop an intrinsic love of learning. Children find learning exciting and stimulating. They are more likely to retain the knowledge they acquire through play, develop confidence in themselves as active learners, and are more fully engaged in learning now and in the future. Every child is unique and has their own learning style. Play-based learning allows children to use their strengths and interests to motivate them to address their challenges in a way that suits them best, without the pressure of conforming to a rigid curriculum or teaching style. Children can explore their interests and abilities, developing their skills and knowledge at a pace that is comfortable for them.

117 Post Office Road
Enfield, CT 06082
860.253.6502
www.enfieldKITE.org
facebook@enfieldKITE

This critical work cannot stop when children leave preschool. Once children enter kindergarten there are many misconceptions that play is not learning and therefore has no place in kindergarten curriculum. This could not be further from the truth, and research shows this. Play in kindergarten (and beyond) should not be viewed as a break from learning. Play-based learning does not detract from academics, it provides the optimal learning environment for children to thrive academically. "Teachers must balance kindergartners' varying abilities and needs while making sure that the curriculum fits appropriately between preschool and first grade." (NAEYC, N.D.[3]). Play is the best vehicle to achieve this. In Enfield we are piloting play-based learning in some of our kindergartens. The initial data supports using this approach, and students are not only meeting, but are EXCEEDING all the standards!

With the passing of section 11 of Bill 6884, the work of aligning preschool and kindergarten curriculums and practices could begin in earnest. Districts will have to ensure that educators have the professional development they need to implement play-based learning in their classrooms. And most importantly, all children would be provided with the opportunity to have a kindergarten experience that is developmentally appropriate and allows for academics to be met through play. It will also provide districts the opportunity and ability to look at how play can be used beyond kindergarten.

We invite members of the Education Committee to visit our classrooms to see play-based learning in action. Come and experience the joy of children learning in an engaging, meaningful, and impactful way.

Jaclyn Valley
Director of Early Childhood Initiatives, Head Start Director, STEAM PK Academy Coordinator at Stowe Early Learning Center

Shannon Steere
Manager of Early Childhood Initiatives, Education and Disabilities Manager for Head Start at Stowe Early Learning Center

Amy Witbro
Partnership Coordinator, Enfield Public Schools

LeAnn Beaulieu
KITE Chairperson

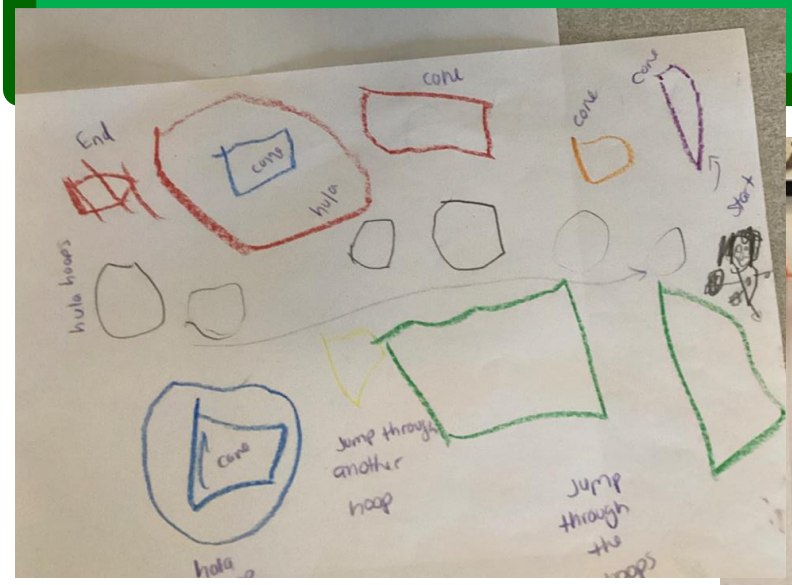
Brianna Beckstrand
KITE Director

1. Moyles, J.R. (2012). A-Z of Play in Early Childhood. Maidenhood: McGraw-Hill Education.
2. Fernald, Marchman, & Weisleder (2013). Cited from NAEYC Website.
3. NAEYC, DAP with Kindergartners, Ages 5-6. www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/dap-kindergartners

Students design, construct, and test obstacle courses as part of a study on *Forces in Motion*.

CTELDS CONNECTIONS:

- **Cognition: curiosity and initiative, cooperation with peers and learning experiences, cause and effect, problem solving, choosing and planning, cognitive flexibility, task persistence**
- **Social Emotional: play and friendship**
- **Physical Development: mobility, large muscle movement and coordination, visual motor integration, and small muscle movement and coordination**
- **Language: vocabulary, language for interaction, print concepts, drawing and writing**
- **Mathematics: spatial relationships, cardinality**
- **Early Scientific Inquiry: Engineering, Energy, Force and Motion**



Students in dramatic play, take on the role of a doctor, examining patients, and keeping medical records.

CTELDS CONNECTIONS:

- **Cognition: engagement with environment, people, and objects, symbolic representation, choosing and planning, cognitive flexibility, task persistence, regulation of attention and impulses**
- **Social Emotional: self concept and competency**
- **Physical Development: small muscle movement and coordination**
- **Language: vocabulary, language for interaction, print concepts, drawing and writing**
- **Creative Arts: Drama**
- **Social Studies: individuals, group, and institutions**

Students design and construct a bowling alley as part of a *Forces in Motion* play scenario.

CTELDS CONNECTIONS:

- Cognition: curiosity and initiative, cooperation with peers and learning experiences, cause and effect, problem solving, choosing and planning, cognitive flexibility, task persistence
- Social Emotional: play and friendship
- Physical Development: mobility, large muscle movement and coordination, visual motor integration, and small muscle movement and coordination
- Language: vocabulary, language for interaction
- Creative Arts: drama
- Mathematics: spatial relationships, cardinality
- Early Scientific Inquiry: Engineering, Energy, Force and Motion

Students take on the roles of engineers and builders as they measure and reference blueprints as they design and build sturdy structures during a unit on *Buildings.*

CTELDS CONNECTIONS:

- **Cognition: curiosity and initiative, cooperation with peers and learning experiences, cause and effect, problem solving, choosing and planning, cognitive flexibility, task persistence**
- **Social Emotional: play and friendship, self concept and competency**
- **Physical Development: mobility, large muscle movement and coordination, visual motor integration, and small muscle movement and coordination**
- **Language: vocabulary, language for interaction, print concepts, drawing and writing**
- **Creative Arts: drama**
- **Mathematics: spatial relationships, measurement, written numerals, identification of shapes, and composition of shapes**
- **Early Scientific Inquiry: engineering, questioning and defining problems**
- **Social Studies: individuals, groups, and institutions, science, technology, and society**